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American Teacher Expelled From China

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PEKING, June 4 — A young American teacher accused of stealing state secrets left China today after being detained and interrogated for nearly a week before being expelled.

Lisa Wichser, who hoped to turn her long fascination with China into an academic career, was seized by Chinese security agents last Friday. She was held incommunicado until Monday, when United States Embassy officials were permitted to visit her.

She was released early Thursday evening after she signed a confession. She was told to leave China within 48 hours. A United States Embassy protest over her treatment was rejected by the Chinese Government.

"There were several days where I was completely isolated, not allowed to contact my embassy, not allowed to have any communication," she told some acquaintances Thursday night. "I wasn't allowed to call people. Nobody knew where I was. I felt I had just kind of disappeared."

Flying Home to Indiana

The 29-year-old teacher was escorted this morning by embassy officials to Peking's international airport, where she boarded a Pan American World Airways flight for Tokyo and San Francisco. She reportedly planned to continue on home to Noblesville, Ind.

Her detention and expulsion highlight two problems experienced by virtually all foreigners who work, teach or study in China.

One is official discouragement of close contacts between the foreigners and Chinese.

Miss Wichser had fallen in love with Yi Shigong, an economics student who had tutored her in Chinese. The couple applied last December for permission to marry. Mr. Yi is now in jail, according to a Chinese source familiar with the case.

Data for a Doctorate

The other problem is official concern that foreigners might learn of information that the Chinese Government does not publish or otherwise release.

Miss Wichser, who is working for a doctorate in economics at the University of Denver, was amassing material for a thesis on agricultural changes in China since 1969.

Her research included some "neibu," or classified internal documents, on the economy. The documents, obtained from Chinese contacts, were among the material that plainclothes agents confiscated when they took Miss Wichser into custody at her room in the Friendship Hotel, where many foreign researchers live.

The New China News Agency re-

ported Thursday that Miss Wichser was being expelled for "violating Chinese law by stealing China's secret information." The official press agency said she "admitted her offense in her written confession and asked for forgiveness." The Government has not revealed the nature of the information involved.

A Common Practice

"She had documents that were not for foreigners to look at," explained a foreign expert who knew Miss Wichser. "Everyone who does research here has that stuff. If they picked up everybody who looked at 'neibu' material, there wouldn't be anyone left living here."

The security agents who seized Miss Wichser told hotel employees that she was a Central Intelligence Agency spy who had been under surveillance for two months. Her friend called the accusation "absolute rot."

A small woman with light brown hair, Miss Wichser has been studying China since she was 16, and speaks Chinese well.

Her Chinese friends included Mr. Yi, a tall, slender son of prominent Communist Party officials, which might account for her being put under surveillance.

Miss Wichser, who taught English and basic economics at a branch of Peking's Foreign Language Institute, was

Friends learned that she was forced to sit on a small stool in her room and answer questions for several hours before being led away to detention.

"They corrected me when I said it was a prison," she recalled after her release Thursday. "They said it wasn't a prison. It was a detention house."

Her friends said Miss Wichser was confined in a cell with a wooden sleeping platform and a can for a toilet. She was awakened repeatedly for interrogation. Among other questions, she was asked to identify people in photographs taken from her room.

The United States Embassy was notified of her detention shortly before noon on Saturday; nearly a day and a half after she was seized. Embassy officials were not permitted to visit her until Monday.

Thursday night, Miss Wichser said, in a brief statement to reporters, "I have always been a friend of China and I will continue to be a friend of the Chinese people." She said afterward that she hoped she would be allowed to return.

Her voice cracking with emotion, Miss Wichser told some acquaintances in her room that she worried about "the responsibility that I have for the people that have been my friends for the last two years, people who have cared about me, loved me, supported me, helped me, who are now going to be, I fear, punished for having been my friends."

State secrets in China include not only unpublished economic and agricultural statistics but also such material as weather forecasts and even foreign news agency reports.

The front door of her room on the third floor of the Friendship Hotel complex was sealed with a violet strip of paper today after her departure. On her mailbox, a small, handwritten note was tacked by a friend who arrived too late. "Wish you luck," it said.

Arrives in San Francisco

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SAN FRANCISCO, June 4 — Miss Wichser read a prepared statement on her arrival at San Francisco International Airport from China saying that she was happy to be back in the United States and that she was not a spy.

"I would like to state categorically, definitely and clearly: No, I am not a spy," Miss Wichser said.

"I have strong, strong and positive feelings toward China and the Chinese people," she said. "I feel I am a friend of the Chinese people and will continue to be a friend."

Washington Denies Connection

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WASHINGTON, June 4 — Alan D. Romberg, a State Department spokesman, said today that Lisa Wichser had no connection with the United States Government.